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18 JUL 1968

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Hanoi's Priorities and Objectives

1. Communist Objectives: The Hanoi government -- which, in the context of this memorandum, means the Politburo of the Vietnamese Communist (Lao Dong) Party -- is engaged in a complex military, political, diplomatic and propaganda struggle with the South Vietnamese Government (the GVN), the US Government and, to a markedly lesser extent, the third country allies whose troops are fighting in South Vietnam. Hanoi's task of waging this complex struggle, however, is greatly simplified by the fact that it has a relatively precise and simple set of priority objectives which facilitate coordinated execution of action in every one of the struggle's various spheres and simultaneously constitute clear benchmarks against which the efficacy of actions in any component of the struggle can be judged. These current objectives, ranked in priority order, are as follows:

- (a) Eradication and elimination of the present GVN and its constitutional structure.
- (b) Its replacement by a governmental and constitutional structure (ideally, one built around the Alliance) within which the Communists can work and one they have a reasonable chance of dominating in the near term future.
- (c) The inducement of US disengagement and withdrawal.

2. The first objective -- eradication and elimination of the present GVN -- is paramount and, in Hanoi's eyes, the key to the whole struggle. From the time of its founding in 1930, the overriding goal of the Vietnamese Communist Party has always been (and is today) the acquisition of political control over all of Vietnam. This goal, perforce, has always carried with it an attendant negative corollary: the need to prevent the evolution of an indigenous (i. e., Vietnamese) state structure not under Communist Party control in any part of Vietnam. This negative corollary constituted the

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rationale for Hanoi's initiation of the current struggle in 1957. Hanoi's paramount immediate objective, thus, is entirely consistent with unswerving Party doctrine from the time the Party was founded.

3. If the present GVN can be eradicated, Hanoi is confident of its followers' ability to outmaneuver and dominate any other extant non-Communist rivals by virtue of the Communists' superior political organization and discipline (backed, of course, by the Party's considerable military force and terrorist apparatus). Ideally, Hanoi would like to see the present GVN replaced with a structure built around the Party's new front vehicle, the Alliance; for this would give the Party a clear and easy shot to power. An Alliance-dominated successor to the GVN would pave the way for speedy fulfillment of the Party's overriding goal and Ho's personal dream of at least fifty years standing. A southern government controlled by Party members responsive to orders issued through Party channels from the Hanoi Politburo would represent fulfillment of that goal (and dream) even if formal governmental reunification had to be temporarily deferred in deference to international sensibilities.

much 4. The inducement of US disengagement from the struggle and withdrawal from the scene also ranks as a major Hanoi objective. Hanoi would very much like to see a fusion of the generalized desire for peace within the United States and the active opposition to the war in a politicized sentiment the US Government simply could not ignore, particularly in an election year. In the past (e.g., Tet) Hanoi has undertaken military operations directed more at US public opinion than at local tactical conditions. This practice will doubtless continue in the future. One of Hanoi's main aims at Paris is to act so that the fact of the talks and manner of their conduct contribute to the politically potent fusion of pro-peace and anti-war sentiment within the US noted above. Nonetheless, the inducement of US disengagement almost certainly ranks lower in priority than eradication of the present GVN and its replacement with a Party-dominated successor. This priority ranking is partly a matter of practical political logic: An elimination of the present GVN could be exploited to eliminate the whole political (and legal and moral) rationale for the US presence in Vietnam. Hanoi almost certainly believes that if a successor government asked the US to withdraw, the US would have little option but to accept. Thus, in Hanoi's eyes, the GVN really is the key. If it can be undermined and toppled (by whatever means), all else -- i.e., victory -- is likely to follow. Hence, the GVN, its stability, and its continued capacity to function constitute collectively Hanoi's paramount immediate target.

5. Hanoi's Advantages: The unity and cohesion of the Communist Party's command structure, the precision of Hanoi's immediate objectives, and the clear ordering of its priorities all give Hanoi certain advantages in the current struggle not enjoyed by its principal adversaries -- i.e., the

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GVN and the US Government. To begin with, despite their disparate sizes, the US and the GVN must fight as allies and partners, a fact which of itself precludes the unity of command the Communist Party structure makes possible for our adversaries. Furthermore, though we are clear on what might be called our negative objective (containing Hanoi's attempt to dictate South Vietnam's political future by force of arms), our positive objectives regarding the shape and form of what we would consider an acceptable post-war political structure (Should it retain, modify, or abandon the present constitution? What political groups can participate, and how?) are less precisely defined than the objectives of our Communist adversaries. Furthermore, the attainability of any political objectives developed by the US is inevitably contingent on certain minimal GVN performance levels and the GVN's behavior is not subject to our command jurisdiction or control. Finally, our priorities -- in two dimensions -- are neither as sharply etched or clearly ranked as those of Hanoi.

(a) Within the context of the Vietnam struggle itself the US would obviously like to:

1. Support the development of a viable non-Communist state structure responsive to the freely expressed political desires of the Vietnamese people.
2. If not disengage from the struggle in the reasonably near term future, at least drastically curtail the level, extent and nature of US involvement.

Our difficulties arise in determining the order in which these two desires should be ranked if it is or should prove impossible for both desires to be realized.

(b) Hanoi can wage the Vietnam struggle with obsessive, single-minded intensity. The US cannot. Hanoi and Saigon are both well aware that the US must weigh its Vietnam policies and decisions in the context of American domestic concerns and in light of America's world-wide commitments and interests including, for example, the present and possible future state of US-Soviet relations.

*flash point
at which
Sov & China
might
come in*

6. Means and Ends: To understand Hanoi's thinking in a manner that will facilitate accurate interpretations or estimates of Hanoi's actions in various fields, it is essential to recognize that Hanoi concentrates on ends or objectives and in a sense is indifferent to the means through which these objectives may be achieved. If the GVN can be undermined and toppled, Hanoi will feel it has won a key battle and is well on the way to final victory.

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While rigid in its objectives, Hanoi is prepared to be completely flexible in its tactics. Overwhelming the GVN and its allied backers on the field of battle might be the Politburo's fondest dream, but Hanoi almost certainly does not anticipate being able to take this road to success. It will, of course, use military pressure wherever, whenever and however seems feasible in furtherance of Hanoi's political objectives. Costs (e.g. casualties) will be reckoned against political gain (including impact on Vietnamese and/or American morale and attitudes) not by purely military canons.

7. In trying various tactics, Hanoi will welcome anything that works. If internal squabbles within the GVN structure (Thieu vs. Ky, the Buddhists demonstrating against "Can Lao resurgence" personified by Khiem) start an unravelling process, Hanoi will be delighted. If stresses and divisions between Washington and Saigon can be fashioned into the back-breaking straw, this too would be fine in Hanoi's eyes. Hanoi's quest for that mix of pressures sufficient to crumble the GVN, coupled with Hanoi's desire to drive the deepest possible wedge between Washington and Saigon, will guide North Vietnamese actions in all spheres of activity. For example, if Hanoi should move in Paris to a serious discussion of a Phase 1, Phase 2 arrangement and get down to specifics on possible Phase 2 tradeoffs, its position is more likely to be shaped by Hanoi's estimate of the political impact on the GVN and the Vietnamese people of the appearance engendered by the implementation of any such agreement than Hanoi's estimate of the strictly military impact of such tradeoffs in northern I Corps.

8. The Soviet Role: Any assessment of current Soviet statements and actions should take cognizance of the considerations outlined above. Certain estimates of Hanoi-Moscow relations are impossible to make, as are certain judgments on who is putting whom up to what. There is little evidence that Moscow has ever taken serious issue with Hanoi's objectives, though there are considerable grounds for suspecting that the Soviets have long felt that Hanoi could more profitably and cheaply pursue these objectives (with considerably less risk) by opting for different policies, i.e. by negotiation and more political action with a diminished emphasis on naked force. The Soviets' private soundings on Vietnam are an obvious indication of a more active Soviet role in this issue. The timing (even if not all of the content) of current Soviet moves in the disarmament and other superficially unrelated fields may also be keyed to Vietnam. To put the matter crudely and, in this bald formulation too simplistically, the Soviets may be trying to whet our appetite over what could come to pass if only the Vietnam issue were out of the way. In support of or in cooperation with Hanoi, in short, the USSR may be consciously endeavoring to sharpen that conflict in overall US goals any priorities noted in paragraph 5 above.

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COMMENT	FILE	RETURN
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Remarks:

George
You might hold
on to this.

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